

Good day for Garrison: Acquittal,

By ALAN KATZ

The acquittal of District Atty. Jim Garrison clearly gives the DA a boost toward his fourth term in office.

That seemed to be the consensus in the wake of yesterday's decision by a federal jury that acquitted the DA on a charge of accepting bribes to protect pinball gambling.

It had been felt in political circles that Garrison would be in serious political trouble if he were convicted, in a touchy political situation if the jury could not reach a decision and in very good political shape if he were acquitted.

Yesterday's acquittal gives Garrison a major boost toward the first test on the road to a fourth term — the Nov. 10 Democratic primary.

Nevertheless, the leaders among Garrison's opponents in the Democratic primary are not likely to ease their efforts in the wake of the acquittal. If anything, the acquittal may spur on Harry Connick, George Reese and Denis Barry in their campaigns. It could also have the effect of making it easier for them to raise money in those segments of the community where Garrison is not admired.

Connick, Reese and Barry, along with Ross Scaccia and William Alford, form the most potent field that Garrison has faced since he was in a field

of seven in 1961 and won in a big upset.

When Garrison returns to the political battlefield, he will find Connick and Rees in particular have been active in wooing the votes who have been in Garrison's corner in the past.

Last night, Connick, considered the district attorney's strongest opponent, said the verdict will have no effect on the tempo of his campaign.

"We're going to conduct our campaign exactly as we have in the past," said Connick, who finished second to Garrison in 1969.

Though he said he is unsure of what effect the verdict will have on the outcome, Connick said: "I feel the fact of whether Mr. Garrison was found innocent is not the important issue. The race should be based on his 12 years in office and his record there."

The main concern of the voters, Connick said, "has to be who is going to do something about the rising crime rate."

The battleground where the DA's election is likely to be settled is in the black community. Garrison got about 80 per cent of the black vote in his 1969 victory over Connick and two others.

A key endorsement could be that of the Southern Organization for Unified Leadership (SOU), a 9th Ward black political group. SOUL supported Garrison in 1969 but reportedly has leaned to Connick this time — at least

prior to yesterday's verdict.

Garrison's political strength has never been a result of the formalities of endorsements. He has put together a coalition of blue-collar whites and the majority of black voters with appeals that go beyond organization endorsements.

Entirely apart from his support from those who like the way he administers the DA's office, Garrison has support from a white constituency which feels he stands up to the federal government, and from a black constituency which admires the DA's continued pledges to track down what he says was a conspiracy to kill President John F. Kennedy.

If the DA is to be unseated, it will be because of community-wide concern over rising crime, particularly violent crimes, and the potential feeling by voters that the DA's office could do more to stem crime.

Public opinion polls, circulated in political circles, have shown Garrison sliding downward in the final weeks of his trial.

But, with the acquittal, it is

A news analysis

election boost

likely that he will recapture many voters who had left his ranks.

The questions that remain to be answered are: whether any allegations made during the trial will damage Garrison despite the acquittal; and whether Garrison's opponents can convince the DA's supporters in past elections that crime in the streets is the real issue and that Garrison isn't doing the job.

While those are the questions, there isn't much argument that the political consensus in New Orleans today is that Jim Garrison is back in a big way and it will take a major upset for anyone to beat him.



—States-Item photo
HARRY CONNICK